



Creating Policy, Systems, Environmental Change: Colusa County Success Story

Title

Healthy Partnerships Help Harness Healthy Markets

Intervention Summary

According to the 2014 SNAP-Ed county profile, 71% of adults within the county are overweight or obese, 15% of the population lives below the federal poverty level and almost 20% of all residents are food insecure. In conjunction with other funded and unfunded partners, it was determined that a concerted effort to improve healthy food access was needed during 2015. A significant component in this effort would be to develop and implement a corner store makeover or retail project.

In the City of Colusa, there are approximately 10 retail outlets in the form of a corner market or liquor store within a half of a mile distance from local schools. Therefore, El Toro Loco seemed a prime location for a retail intervention. This corner market serves primarily Hispanic shoppers for their convenience food and beverage needs as well as household staple items. Shoppers may also use the market to cash their weekly checks and often the physical location of the market and surrounding parking lot area become a social hub for the community.

The primary objective of the retail project was to increase sales of and exposure to existing fruits and vegetables found at the frequented corner market. The intervention consisted of interior signage, attempts at a healthy checkout station and endcaps and attempts to shift the interior landscape to highlight healthier items. In conjunction with the environmental changes, eight in-store food demos with tastings highlighting four different produce items occurred. The produce items were already stocked in the small produce section of the store and were selected based on low price for customers and ease of recipe selection. The interventions were conducted over an eight week period

during the months of February, March and April. When the store's sales data for these months was compared to sales data from the previous year, it was found that produce sales doubled during and immediately following the interventions.

The enormous success of these interventions was dependent on the relationships created with the Colusa County Department of Behavioral Health's Friday Night Live (FNL) students from the local high school. These students were trained before the interventions began and were present at each intervention to build their pre-professional skills while working hands-on in their own community. The interventions benefitted from their enthusiasm, community connections, bi-lingual/bi-cultural communication and leadership skills. These FNL youth were truly the conduit in which environment change was able to occur in their community.

Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions

In Colusa County, our most significant barriers to obesity prevention and nutrition education continue to be the language barrier between English-speaking educators and Spanish-speaking SNAP-Ed participants. Another significant barrier is the extensive travel required for direct services. The travel distance between Chico (where the Center for Healthy Communities (CHC) is located) and Colusa can be between 90-150 miles round trip, requiring a minimum drive time of up to two hours per round trip. Both of these challenges have been met by working to extensively to train both the local, Spanish-speaking health department staff and the local, Spanish-speaking FNL youth. At any retail event, multiple Spanish-speakers were present to communicate and interact with our participants in a culturally appropriate manner.

Barriers unique to the retail project were communication with the store manager, communication with and between the store staff and resistance to move/relocate high profit, unhealthy food or beverage products. To address this, communication was done solely in person with the manager and staff as speaking over the phone or email was not possible. Also, hard copies of the information, calendars and other materials for the store owner and staff were delivered to create the best foundation for understanding interventions goals and strategies. Methods to address the interior landscape of the store are still being sought out; however, that is a high priority for the next phase of the project.

Future Directions/Sustainable Success

In the short term, CHC plans are woven directly into the Integrated Work Plan (Objective 2) and PSE Strategy- Healthy Retail, for this upcoming 2016 contract year. CHC will use recently collected CX3 data as well as continue the strong partnership with the youth from FNL. CHC will look to the CX3 data collection results and the youth to guide the way beyond the single retail intervention site focused on this past year. Specifically, CHC will: 1) Provide assistance to one new retail site (for a total of 2) to assist them in a healthy store makeover as well as increase their sales of

fruits/vegetable, 2) provide on-going, monthly retail events to increase shoppers exposure to a variety of fresh fruits and veggies through taste testings, 3) provide networking or training sessions for retail store staff, 4) host a partner forum for relevant stakeholders to disseminate CX3 data results. CHC's long term goals are to continue work at the maintenance level at both retail locations and look to bring on additional sites. CHC will focus on making progress within the interior landscape of the stores, specifically starting to physically move around healthy/unhealthy items to change sales data, creating a lasting healthy "snacking zone" at check out and endcaps and to maintain our strong partnership with the youth.

Contact information about this Narrative

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